

Report

San Juan Island National Historical Park

■ 1.0 Site Description

San Juan Island National Historical Park (NHP) commemorates the peaceful resolution of a near armed conflict between American and British troops in 1859. That conflict arose from a four-decade-long dispute regarding the boundary between Canada and United States. The agreement of 1846, which set the 49th Parallel as the U.S.-Canada border, failed to resolve joint claims over San Juan Island (SJI). Following this near conflict, the U.S. and Great Britain relied on diplomatic channels to resolve the dispute, with the U.S. gaining control of SJI in 1872. The NHP was formed in 1966 to highlight the point that “individuals and nations can resolve their differences peaceably without resorting to violence.”

SJI is located in the Strait of Juan De Fuca, about 70 miles northwest of Seattle, Washington (see Figure 1). The NHP occupies about 1,750 acres on the 55-square-mile island. The NHP consists of two distinct units, American Camp and British Camp, which are separated by 13 miles. The NHP also maintains park headquarters and a visitor contact station in Friday Harbor, Washington, the main town on SJI (see Figure 2).

The American Camp unit consists of a Visitor Center, with archaeological and historic displays, that is open daily during summer months, and Thursday through Sunday at other times. American Camp also has a number of historical buildings, hiking and historical trails, and scenic vistas. The English Camp unit includes a visitor contact station that is open daily during summer months, but closed at other times of the year. English Camp also has four historic buildings and walking trails. During summer months, both units have several special weekend programs that focus on historical aspects of island life and the confrontation in 1859.

There are no concessions or overnight lodging at any of the NHP facilities. However, there are many privately run facilities on SJI that are within close proximity of the NHP. NHP staff indicated that residents on SJI take great pride in the park and use park facilities extensively for locally oriented recreation activities. While a recent NHP visitor survey indicated that only about 12 percent of visitors to the NHP during summer months are island residents, NHP staff indicated that a majority of the 250,000 visitors are accompanied to the park by an island resident.

Figure 1. Location of San Juan Island

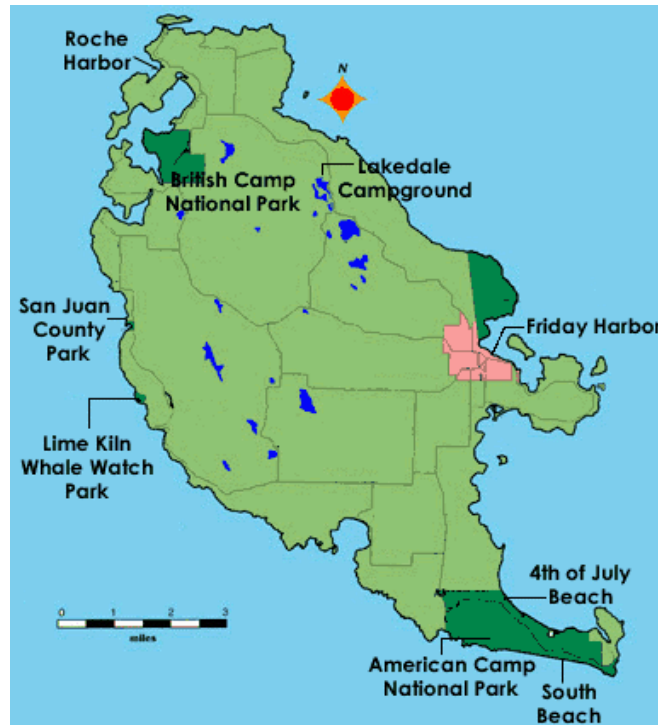
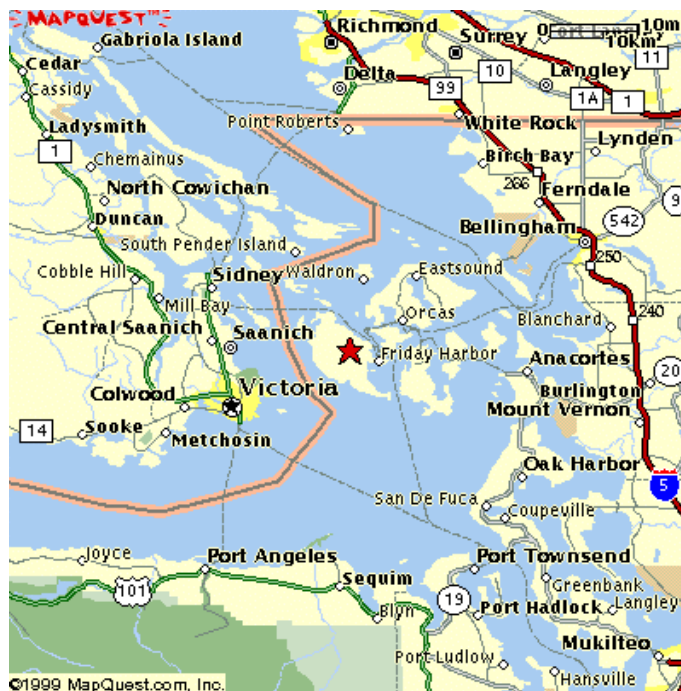


Figure 2. Major Destinations on San Juan Island



SJI has about 6,000 year-round residents. This population grows dramatically during the summer tourist season. Visitation at the NHP follows the island's population and tourism

pattern. During summer months, the average stay on the island is about two to three days, with about one-third of visitors staying one day or less, and about one-fourth of visitors staying for four or more days. Most island visitors come for general attractions on the island, rather than to visit the NHP. The visitor survey indicated that the NHP was not the primary island destination for over 80 percent of park visitors, and over one-half of park visitors were not aware of the NHP before visiting the island.

NHP visitors tend to arrive in small family groups of two to four people; fewer than two percent of all visitors arrived in any type of formal tour group. About 50 percent of NHP visitors are from Washington State, about 25 percent from Oregon and California, and five percent from Canada; the remainder of visitors come from other States. According to the visitor survey, the most common visitor activities include “sightseeing,” hiking and walking, wildlife viewing, picnicking, and beach activities; most NHP visitors do not spend extensive time viewing interpretive exhibits. The “typical” NHP visit is about three hours, with about two-thirds of visits classified as “first-time.” The median age of NHP visitors is between 35 and 40.

■ 2.0 Existing Transportation Services

The only access to SJI and the NHP is by boat or airplane. The Washington Department of Transportation (DOT) operates a car and passenger ferry between Anacortes, Washington and Friday Harbor; travel time varies between 60 and 90 minutes. Ferry frequency, which varies by season and day, is between eight and 12 round trips per day, with one ferry run continuing to Sidney, British Columbia. Washington DOT operates additional ferry shuttle service between SJI and other island communities in the area. Ridership on the Anacortes ferry varies by season. However, during peak season, waits of several hours are quite common for automobiles on Friday evening and Sunday afternoon.

Several private companies also provide passenger-only access to SJI. The *Victoria Clipper* provides one round-trip per day between Seattle, Friday Harbor, and Victoria, British Columbia. It runs from mid-May to mid-September, and charges a round-trip fare of \$49 between Seattle and Friday Harbor. *Puget Sound Express* provides one round-trip per day between Port Townsend, Washington and Friday Harbor. It runs from late March to early October, and charges a round-trip fare of \$45 to \$50. *San Juan Island Express* provides one round-trip per day between Bellingham, Washington and Friday Harbor. It runs from late May to late September, and charges a round-trip fare of \$33. Commercial airline service is available to Friday Harbor from Seattle, Bellingham and Anacortes, Washington.

About 85 percent of NHP visitors used one of the ferry services to reach SJI. About 10 percent used private boats and five percent use commercial or private planes. Upon reaching the island, about 80 percent of NHP visitors used either a private auto or rental car to reach one of the units. About 15 percent use bicycle or moped, and the remainder either walk or use a taxi or the island shuttle service. Automobile parking is provided at both American Camp (125 spaces) and English Camp (40 spaces). The parking was characterized as adequate, except when special events are held on summer weekends.

The shuttle operates in a loop pattern around SJI with the terminus in Friday Harbor. A principal loop runs from Friday Harbor to Roche Harbor returning via Limekiln Point State Park with English Camp as a stop option. A secondary loop runs from Friday Harbor to Cattle Point with American Camp as a stop option. While the shuttle passes both the American Camp and English Camp units of the NHP, it does not provide extensive service through the business core of Friday Harbor, and does not provide timed-transfers at the ferry terminal. The shuttle, which has been in operation for about three years, runs daily during the summer season with an abbreviated schedule during spring and fall; it does not run in winter. During peak times, the shuttle runs once or twice per hour. It is privately funded, with a point-to-point fare of \$4.00 or round-trip fare of \$7.00. NHP staff indicated that the shuttle appears to be most heavily used by day visitors to the island, which, as previously indicated, account for about one-fourth of island visitors.

■ 3.0 ATS Needs

NHP staff indicated that most roadways through American Camp and English Camp are narrow, have gravel surfaces, and are in relatively poor shape. Given the popularity of bicycling on SJI, this situation can lead to conflicts between automobiles and the 15 percent of visitors who access the NHP via bicycle. The NHP is very interested in providing an improved network of bicycle routes, lanes, and/or paths within and between the two units. These improvements would amount to about 1.5 miles of facilities at English Camp and at least three miles of facilities within American Camp. The improvements would provide immediate benefits for current bicyclists, and further promote an Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) mode that is already widely supported on SJI.

NHP staff has held informal discussions about enhancing the availability of other ATS services between park units. However, a lack of funds as well as an impending update to the General Management Plan (GMP) has impeded a more thorough review of these services. Based on preliminary internal discussions and feedback from park visitors, NHP staff would like more frequent shuttle service between American Camp, English Camp, and the ferry terminal and visitor contact station in Friday Harbor. NHP staff also indicated that in order to be successful, a new shuttle service would need to serve other major island destinations such as Limekiln Point State Park, which is a very popular location for whale watching. A one-way loop shuttle serving Friday Harbor, American Camp, the state park, and English Camp would be about 35 miles in length.

■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

The issue of bicycle access to the NHP was the most frequently mentioned transportation issue by survey respondents in the Visitor Services Plan. Bicycling is very popular on SJI, and is supported through a network of bicycle lanes and routes. However, current bicycle facilities on the island are characterized as poor, and accidents are common in the summer months due to narrow, sometimes poorly surfaced roads. The NHP has developed pro-

posals to improve the access roads through resurfacing and construction of wider shoulders for bicycles. However, they have been unsuccessful in receiving any discretionary Public Lands funds.

The NHP will begin development of a new GMP in about 18 months. NHP staff expects that the location and scope of the visitor contact station in Friday Harbor could be a major discussion issue. Currently, 75 percent of visitors do not stop at the Friday Harbor visitor contact station before visiting other units. With a more prominent contact station in Friday Harbor, it may be possible to encourage greater use of an enhanced shuttle service or other non-automotive modes for access to American and English camps. These shuttle service options are also expected to be a discussion item during GMP preparation. In particular, since most NHP visitors prefer outdoor activities while at the park units, the shuttle service would provide a means for introducing visitors to the historical and interpretive aspects of the NHP.

The residents and decision-makers on SJI are also beginning to take a more proactive stance on discouraging auto travel to the island. This stance is prompted, in part, by increasing roadway congestion in Friday Harbor on summer weekends. The heavy usage of the Anacortes auto ferry during summer months also suggests that further growth in auto transport to SJI will be difficult at peak times. These issues suggest that more island visitors may arrive without automobiles, thereby requiring alternative access means to the different NHP units.

A complicating factor in these plans and trends is the recent passage of tax reform measures in Washington State. One result of these measures is that less money is available for transportation services and facilities throughout the state. NHP staff expects that it will be very difficult to leverage state or local funding for any projects. Instead, any funding will likely need to be fee-based or from federal sources.

■ 5.0 Bibliography

Visitor Services Project, San Juan Island National Historical Park; Visitor Services Project Report 70, University of Idaho; April, 1995.

Washington State Ferries, Sailing Schedule; Washington State Department of Transportation; Fall 1999.

■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Cicely Muldoon, Superintendent, San Juan Island National Historical Park

Bill Gleason, Chief Ranger, San Juan Island National Historical Park